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ABSTRACT

This brochure for educators discusses bilingual children and talent development. It defines the optimal level of bilingualism as balanced bilingualism, in which the bilingual student shows age-appropriate abilities and feels at ease in both languages. At this level bilingual children may be more flexible in their thinking mainly because of the constant switching and awareness of using both languages. It is stressed that the development and nurturance of both languages is needed to contribute to talent development in all domains. Educators are urged to: (1) provide a learning environment that encourages bilingualism, values cultural differences, and supports these students' expressions of their strengths and interests; (2) show positive and high expectations of their bilingual students as well as an awareness of the family culture; (3) use flexible and diverse assessment procedures for the identification of cognitive strengths, abilities, interests, and learning styles of bilingual students; (4) establish programs that provide enrichment opportunities in both languages to promote talent development; (5) allow students to develop individual and group projects by selecting an interest topic or area of study; and (6) encourage family and community members to participate as facilitators of enrichment clusters, and exploratory and investigative activities, and as mentors. (CR)

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THE NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER

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GIFTED AND TALENTED

WHAT EDUCATORS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BILINGUAL STUDENTS AND...TALENT DEVELOPMENT

PRACTITIONERS' GUIDE #A9713

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E. Gubbins

research FACTS

The bilingual student uses his or her two languages as an interdependent system. Knowledge that is acquired in one language readily transfers to the other. However, the bilingual [student] is also able to remember the particular language in which events occurred. (p. 232)

Hakuta, K. (1986). *Mirror of language: The debate on bilingualism.* New York: Basic Books.

Enrichment approaches, in which children acquire a second language without abandoning their mother tongue, lead to higher levels of bilingual proficiency, along with improved self-esteem and more favorable attitudes toward other cultures. (p. 167)

Crawford, J. (1991). *Bilingual education: History, politics, theory, and practice.* Los Angeles, CA: Bilingual Educational Services.

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model is one of the most successful models in developing the talent potentials of young people by: a) assessing strengths systematically; b) providing enrichment opportunities, resources, and services to develop the strengths of all students; and c) using a flexible approach to curricular differentiation and the use of school time. (p. 294)

Renzulli, J. S. (1994). *Schools for talent development: A practical plan for total school improvement.* Mansfield, CT: Creative Learning Press.

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What educators need to know about bilingual students and... TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Practitioners' Guide – A9713
Valentina Kloosterman & Eva Díaz – Editors
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IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

BILINGUALISM

Bilingualism is a very complex phenomenon. It involves cognitive, affective, cultural, environmental, and situational factors. Interactions among these factors cause differences in bilingual students. Hence, the range of proficiency skills in the two languages can vary widely, from fluent bilingualism to limited communicative skills in either one of the two languages. The optimal level is known as balanced bilingualism. At this level, the bilingual student shows age-appropriate abilities and feels at ease in both languages. Actually, the closer the child is to this level, the greater the cognitive and social benefits to him or her. Bilingual children may be more flexible in their thinking (reasoning and discussion) mainly because of the constant switching and the awareness of using both languages.

The development of bilingual language abilities (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking) across the life-span involves the bilingual child alternating the use of the two languages, according to the situation and the context.

What a child brings to school in terms of cultural background, experiences, and abilities are essential starting points for the provision of a caring and meaningful education.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Development and nurturance of both languages are essential contributors to talent development in all domains. Linguistic proficiency, language use, and talent potential evolve within responsive learning environments.

Learning environments that encourage bilingualism and value cultural differences support the students' expressions of their strengths and interests. Within these enriched environments, students have the opportunity not only to develop higher levels of bilingual proficiency but also to advance their knowledge in a particular interest area. In addition, by facilitating opportunities for cognitive, affective, and linguistic growth, the learning environments also promote the manifestation and identification of high potential.

In this respect, it is crucial that teachers show positive and high expectations of their bilingual students as well as be aware of the family culture. Teachers should be given the opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills about working with culturally and linguistically diverse students through professional development opportunities.

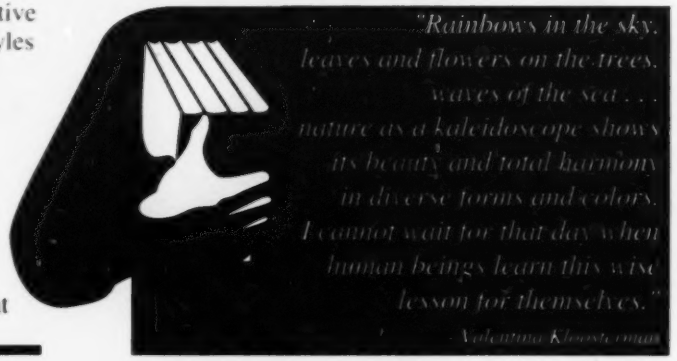
Flexible and diverse assessment procedures are recommended for the identification of cognitive strengths, abilities, interests, and learning styles of bilingual students. Both assessment and educational services must consider the age, cultural background, family dynamics, community context, language proficiency, and personal characteristics of each bilingual student.

Programs that provide enrichment opportunities in both languages are highly recommended to promote talent development in all bilingual students, especially high ability bilingual students. Enrichment programs should emphasize students' strengths and allow teachers to facilitate more challenging learning experiences.

Students may develop individual and group projects by selecting an interest topic or area of study. Students may be able to accomplish enrichment projects by using bilingual material at a higher proficiency level. On one hand, students expand their knowledge of a particular interest area and on the other hand, they develop their ability to use their two languages.

Family and community members are excellent resources for enrichment activities. They can participate as facilitators of enrichment clusters, exploratory and investigative activities, and as mentors.

Some important considerations for educators in the identification and development of talents in bilingual students are to: a) be aware of students' learning, affective, social, and linguistic needs; b) be knowledgeable of family and community characteristics, as well as students' activities within the community; c) encourage parent and community involvement in educational experiences; d) focus on academic strengths and talents using both languages; e) assess students' learning styles and students' proficiency in both languages; and f) record students' development and academic performance by using anecdotal forms, logs, portfolios, and journals.


"Rainbows in the sky, leaves and flowers on the trees, waves of the sea . . . nature as a kaleidoscope shows its beauty and total harmony in diverse forms and colors. I cannot wait for that day when human beings learn this wise lesson for themselves."
Valentina Kleeva

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